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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the current role of practicing librarians in library education together with the debate on whether the grounding given to future librarians should be theoretical or practical. Reasons why students, educators, and employers are dissatisfied with the current status of library education are suggested. The benefits of librarians teaching library school courses are described, including the exposure of students to positive role models and the improved image of the librarian. Team teaching a course with a library school faculty member is suggested as one way for librarians to become involved in the educative process. Other suggestions for library participation in library education include setting up programs in the schools, giving input on curriculum, becoming involved in such faculty-student interaction as orientation, and becoming involved in the accreditation process. The importance of continuing education for librarians is stressed. (11 references) (MES)

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The Role of Practising Librarians in Library Education

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Why are so few practising librarians involved in the education of our successors? I would like to posit that the main reason for this is the dialectic within the profession - training versus education - which will have devastating results for the future of librarianship if we do not resolve it and become involved with library school education. I will be suggesting ways in which to do this, ranging from library-school internships through teaching courses and becoming involved in research. The relevance of this topic to today's academic librarians is shown in Joseph Boissé's statement of themes for the future "ACRL must also become more active in the area of library education ... We must work with library educators and other associations of librarians in order to design the library school curriculum of the future."

There is a crisis in the field of library/information science which is reflected in the education of our professionals. Hans-Peter Geh, President of IFLA, succinctly referred to this at the annual IFLA meeting last August in England -

"Can the profession adapt to a rapidly changing social and technological environment and provide the type of librarian that is really needed?"[1]

What is the role of practising librarians in library education today? Very bluntly, it is extremely small. Historically speaking, library education has moved over the years from an emphasis on practice to an emphasis on theory. In the early years of schools of librarianship, the faculty recruited to teach had substantial experience in the field before becoming educators. It is more common these days to recruit solely on the basis of academic qualifications. 'Advocate' faculty members who lobby on library issues, work with libraries, give presentations to librarians, are looked down upon by the administration and often their colleagues.

The debate between a theoretical or practical grounding for library education, as in other professions, has raged for many years. There seems to be a basic agreement within the profession that theory and practice should be integrated. However what is not agreed upon is how to achieve this integration, in what ratio, and what

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practical experience should teaching faculty have. In 1936, Robert Maynard Hutchins, as President of the University of Chicago, criticized what he saw to be a trend towards vocationalism in higher education. In 1970, ALA stated, "the objective of the master's programs in librarianship should be to prepare librarians capable of anticipating and engineering the change and improvement required to move the profession constantly forward.... The curriculum and teaching methods should be designed to serve this kind of education for the future rather than to train for the practice of the present."[2] Closer to the present in 1985, the Committee on Institutional Cooperation released a publication addressed to accreditation teams reminding them that it was universities and not professional associations that made decisions about curriculum.

It is easy to generalize and say that the viewpoint depends upon which side of the fence it comes from, yet this generalization is not without some basis in fact. In 1986, Susan K. Martin, Director, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, Johns Hopkins University, made an eloquent plea for educators and practitioners to work together to resolve what she called the "chronic tension" between the two - "Educators and practioners of library and information science have too long operated in a 'we-they' environment. If we are to improve our profession's educational system, the two groups must work together..."[3] Whereas in 1987, when asked how important it was for library school faculty to have practical experience, Leigh Esterbrook, Dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois, replied, "Well, to be perfectly honest, I don't care a lot about professional experience of the faculty. I care that faculty have a good sense of what is going on in the profession. ... We do have that formal obligation to turn out students who are considered minimally competent in entry level work. We are much more obligated to turn out people who will make a significant contribution to the field over the long run. ... They (the faculty) need to see the forest, but whether or not they can identify the conifers may not be so critical."[4]

All three sides of the educative triangle are dissatisfied with the current status of library education. (1) Students are dissatisfied because their courses seem boring, outdated and either lacking in relevance or too system-specific. (2) Educators are dissatisfied because outside influences are mainly responsible for adjusting the curriculum. (3) Employers are dissatisfied because the graduates of library schools

seem totally unprepared for the jobs they apply for, much time has to be spent by library staff in training, and the so-called 'best and brightest' are being siphoned off elsewhere by higher salaries and trendy job descriptions.

One area of library education that this is particularly noticeable in is the teaching of cataloging. There has been much criticism of library schools lately for not preparing catalogers adequately. The role of cataloging and classification in library school curricula has decreased, whereas the complexity of cataloging has increased.

Practising librarians must take an increased role in shaping a resolution to these seemingly unresolvable questions. Firstly, student dissatisfaction must certainly be addressed. It must be remembered that graduate students across the disciplines tend to react the same way about their graduate studies. However, my gut feeling (and my own personal experience) is that this dissatisfaction is much more real than imagined. This deficiency of stimulating intellectual content has been recognized by some innovative schools, and several creative courses have been set up to provide a more invigorating forum for our graduate students. One example is LS5813, 'The Information Professions', at the School of Library Science of Texas Women's University, which uses Plato's The Republic as the 'base book'.[5]

Secondly, the library-school faculty, who face some of the same identity problems that librarians face, have an inability to see where they are going which has nothing to do with the unavailability of crystal balls. Until the library profession as a whole feels it can stand on an equal footing with other academic disciplines, then these dilemmas will not be resolved satisfactorily. In the meantime, life must go on and students must be educated. Research - both theoretical and applied - must be done. As Susan Martin said, "We must recognize that innovation and research take place both in the so-called 'ivory tower' and in the field ... But library innovations are born of necessity and educators must be aware of the products of the working laboratory".[6]

Thirdly, the employers - who in some cases will hire the recent graduate, in other cases will be training the graduate, and who will nearly always have shared the same educative experience as the graduate - why are they not more fully involved with the student, the library-school, and most importantly, with the education of future colleagues and successors? Some of the previously

mentioned reasons pertain. Because of image problems on college campuses, there has been a desire to put distance between the library-school programs and the people who work in the library. Faculty members are often unable to discriminate between librarians and support staff. This feeling rubs off on library-school Deans who are less likely to want to involve librarians in teaching courses because it smacks too much of "training". We librarians are also at fault. We tend to undervalue our expertise and abilities. A skilled and seasoned reference librarian should have no problem in conducting a semester long course on reference tools or information sources in a particular field. A cataloger should be able to structure a course which would involve both theory and the practice of cataloging and classification.

The benefits from the use of practising librarians in the teaching of library school courses are enormous. The students are exposed to positive role models who can show the exciting things going on in the profession. The librarian as recruiter counteracts many negative images. The library-school benefits because it immediately steps out of the realm of theory and into the world of experience. Faculty members who have been asked, for instance, by private companies to review or endorse some of their products, might be interested to know how they actually work in a real-life library with real-life patrons. This sharing of information could be the beginning of a close relationship that can result in internships, graduate assistantships, opportunities for publication and a whole gamut of interaction. The library is a laboratory not only for students, but for the library school faculty, who need a proving ground for their research.

One of the prime benefits of librarians teaching courses is the improved image of the librarian. Teaching is something readily understood by the rest of the academic community. At tenure or promotion time, it is something on a vita that equals the other faculty members' job descriptions. You are part of the same club. Your experience with the students enables you to understand classroom issues on grading, cheating, attendance, curriculum content, which were all mysteries before. Your ability to participate in campus-wide governance committees is much improved. You start to talk the same language. Your ability to relate to students is increased. You are part of the wider field of higher education. Your self-image will improve drastically. After the first couple of weeks of total panic, after you have realized how much knowledge you have to share with

the students, you will come away from class invigorated by the give and take of discussion, excited because the students are making discoveries under your tutelage. Even the fact that a student discovers the existence of the LCSH Red Books, and learns how to use them, is a major triumph.

Librarians are not strangers to the educative role. Almost everything we do can be described as 'educative'. Team-teaching with a library-school faculty member is a good way to begin one's teaching career. A combination of theory and practice in one course, taught by a theoretician and a practioner, can provide a very refreshing and relevant experience for the student. It does not have to be the negative experience that many library school faculty are wary of. Students have a right to know and share some practical experiences to which they have not yet been exposed.

There has been a concern that too many librarians teaching for the library school is an incorrect use of scarce library resources. After all, who is running the library if all the librarians are teaching. Yet I personally feel that nothing but good can come of an increased, in-depth relationship between the library school and the library, in the same way that doctors and medical students interact in a teaching hospital. The university library should be able to think of itself as a laboratory to be used by library school students. The pros and cons of this kind of exchange have been carefully documented in an article written about the experience of two librarians in England who were seconded to the Department of Library and Information Studies at Loughborough University of Technology for a year.[7]

Teaching courses is not the only way that librarians can participate in the educative process with the library school. One can become involved with setting up programs in the schools, giving input on curriculum, becoming involved in faculty/student interaction like orientation. These activities promote library cooperation and give one a better understanding of the various client groups. Teaching in other disciplines is a wonderful way to improve the image of the library and the librarians, and to bridge the gap between library and other faculty members.

A slightly different way for a practising librarian to become more involved in library education, is to participate in the accreditation process. Currently, this is governed by AIA - specifically the Committee on

Accreditation. There are many differing viewpoints upon the advisability of the accreditation process being handled through ALA, and again on the involvement of practitioners in accrediting programs. I, myself, feel that there is a balance which needs to be maintained, and I would urge that librarians become involved in this process. It is an extremely time-consuming responsibility, not one to be taken lightly, but which will bring many personal and professional rewards. One has the opportunity not only to have input on library school curriculum, but in working to make the role of COA more catalytic, forcing practioners and educators to work together, promoting an involvement for both sides in theoretical and applied research which will advance the profession and filter back into the classroom.

The educative process does not finish upon receipt of the MLS. We are, each one of us, individually responsible for continuing our own personal educative process. Continuing education is essential for the librarian to remain in a position to further the profession. The practising librarian must be engaged in both sides of the continuing education process - in taking courses that not only keep one abreast and enable one to creatively advance the profession; but also in providing continuing education opportunities for junior librarians.

There are many ways to do this. It is disappointing to see that, for the most part, library schools are sending forth their graduates without any provision for care or watering. Recent ALISE statistics show that library schools have reduced their involvement with continuing education by 20% over the last 6 years, and that 35% fewer people are being provided with the opportunity to take courses.[8] This is happening at a time when technological advances are occuring at an exponential rate. As Darlene Weingand states "... the shelflife of the preservice MLS now stands at approximately five years - and the rate of societal change continually challenges that estimate. Occupational obsolescence is now a very real concern in all lines of work, but it is particularly critical in the information professions ..."[9] Does this mean that (1) librarians are losing the battle to keep abreast of if not ahead of technological change? (2) training and continuing education are provided in the workplace? (3) Continuing education opportunities are being provided elsewhere, such as by local library associations? The answer is all of the above and none of the above. Some librarians are losing the battle, yet others are leading the profession, and in some cases going outside the profession to provide leadership on

technological issues. A lot of training is provided in the workplace, and yet the common cry is that there are never enough opportunities provided for staff development, particularly in applications or technology not yet current in the home institution. Many local organizations are very successful in offering continuing education opportunities - both in the larger issues and the more specific technological applications. Librarians are doing a lot of sharing, and natural teachers are coming to the forefront for lack of a formal continuing educational structure.

In April 1988, Dean Richard Halsey of the School of Information Science and Policy at the University of Albany, spoke to the Eastern New York Chapter of ACRL on "A Regenerative Curriculum for Academic Librarianship". However, his prescription for the renewal of library education failed to take into account the general implications of the society we live in. Going back to Hans-Peter Geh - it is not just the technological environment which is changing, but the social environment. Curricular revision will be to no avail if we neglect the larger context within which we are working. Former SUNY Chancellor Wharton pointed this out in a speech at the Association of American Colleges in January, 1988. "I believe that the dilemma faced by educators today - in colleges and universities, no less than in primary and secondary schools - goes beyond the relatively manageable issues of curricular structure ... Much of what we find most intractable and disturbing about academic performance, student behavior, and youth values is rooted in fundamental upheaval in the society ..."[10] The Williamson Report, the Conant Report, and now the King Report, are all a testimony to this.

There are signs that this regenerative process has begun, as shown by the "I (internship) for an I (instructor)" program at the School of Library and Information Science, University of Missouri-Columbia; the CLR PETREL (Professional Education and Training for Research Librarianship) Program; the Intern-Scholar Program at UMC; and ACRL President Joseph Boissé's pledge to "work with library educators and other associations of librarians in order to design the library school curriculum of the future."[11] Never has there been a more crucial time for practising librarians to accept more responsibility for the future, by getting involved in the education of the students who <u>are</u> the future.

As Hillel the Elder, a Jewish rabbi living at the time of Christ said, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? Yet if I am for myself only, what am I?"[12]

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